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Q2S Enhancing Pedagogy. 70.
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Interdisciplinary Lesson Plans to study Art and Romantic Poetry (1775-1837)

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December 2019

Overview

Enhanced Pedagogy funding has supported the design of three interdisciplinary lesson plans for California State University, San Bernardino students to study the relationship between art and Romantic poetry (1775-1837).

Following the scholarship of Stuart Henry, William Condee exposes the problem in academe of “disciplinary hegemony.” Henry argues that “disciplines have come to control content, pedagogy and the organization of higher learning. Disciplines. . . become systems of power that control resources and access to dissemination” (Henry qtd. in Condee 4).¹Disciplinary hegemony *fractures* lines of continuity between subjects. My project seeks to facilitate a robust engagement with art and ancient artefacts in the study of Romantic poetry. What is presented here are three interdisciplinary lesson plans on the poetry of Keats, Wordsworth, and Byron. My goal is to revitalize connections which have been broken by disciplinary hegemony, connections which reveal a culturally rich and intertextual conversation in the nineteenth century. Interdisciplinary study allows students to deepen their understanding of literary works through close reading, description of art, and analysis through comparison of text and image. With its curation of Romantic poems and related works of art, this project seeks to stimulate student inquiry and analysis and to inspire activities for life-long learning.

Research

For inspiration, Western artists and artisans have long seized upon mythological and historic figures from Mediterranean cultures, personalities from literature, and the contours and elements of ancient monuments and architectural sites. One of the challenges I faced in this project was how to narrow the selection of artwork I studied in the European galleries and Mediterranean collections of museums in Southern California, artwork which could be paired meaningfully with Romantic poetry. Ultimately, I selected art works that corresponded directly or indirectly with assigned poems, mindful of what is available for viewing in online galleries, attentive to a variety of media such as watercolor and oil, and materials such as terracotta and marble, and invested in works I thought were evocative and rich for comparison and analysis. The interdisciplinary prompts encourage students to study artefacts and artworks which can be viewed online, but hopefully these lessons will also inspire CSUSB students to tour collections in the region, specifically the Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art on the CSUSB campus, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Getty Villa in Malibu, and the European Gallery of the Huntington Library in San Marino.

In addition to field work, this project was informed by exchanges and communications with Eva Kirsch, Director of the Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art, and Matthew Poole, Professor and Chair of the Art Department at CSUSB.

Overview of Project: Interdisciplinary Lesson Plans to study Art and Romantic Poetry (1775-1837)

- I. ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. John Keats. 1820.
Volute Krater, attributed to The Baltimore Painter, Red Figure. Apulia, South Italy. About 340 B.C.
Sosibios Krater, Neo-Attic, 50 B.C.
- II. William Wordsworth. “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, 13 July 1798”
Edward Dayes, artist. Francis Jukes, engraver. *The View of Tintern Abbey on the River Wye*. 1799.
Joseph M.W. Turner. “Interior of Tintern Abbey”, 1794.
- III. Lord Byron. *The Giaour*. 1813.
Eugene Delacroix. *The Combat of Giaour and Hassan*, 1826.

¹ See Condee, William. “The Interdisciplinary Turn in the Arts & Humanities.” *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*. No. 34, pp. 12-29 (2016).

I. **Assigned Text: 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. John Keats. 1820.**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn>

This part of my Enhanced Pedagogy project involved research of ancient Mediterranean ceramics at the Getty Villa and consultation with Eva Kirsch, director of the Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art (RAFFMA) at California State University, San Bernardino. To understand John Keats' romantic poem, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' it's helpful to have a familiarity with the ceremonies and conventions associated with Ancient Greek pottery, as well as an awareness of the exportation of vessels from Greece to other parts of the Mediterranean. Pottery was immensely important in funerary rites of passage, to transport items of trade such as olive oil, and to hold domestic goods such as wine and water.

Exhibited in RAFFMA's *Greeks in the Boot* 2014 were a collection of Ancient Greek ceramics lent by the Getty Villa, among other museums, and in combination with RAFFMA's own Ancient Mediterranean pottery. Kirsch explains in the exhibition catalogue that with the migration of Greek artisans to Italy, workshops surfaced that continued to employ Greek techniques. More specifically, artisans "in the Boot" adopted trademark shapes such as the volute krater below; used particular pigments, especially black and red, and recognized the intended function of the vessels (for wine, water, etc.). Sometimes potters and painters adhered to Greek traditions and sometimes they departed from them, as in this urn below which, in comparison with its classic Greek counterparts, may appear more "busy."

Artwork: Volute Krater, attributed to The Baltimore Painter, Red Figure. Apulia, South Italy. About 340 B.C.
Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art



Material: Terracotta

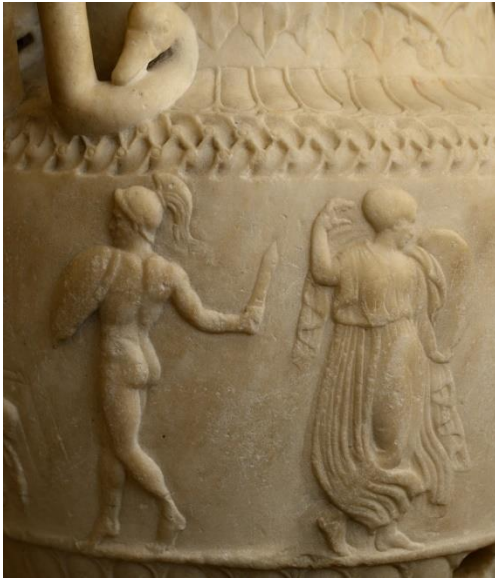
What's important for our reading of Keats' famous poem, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' is that both Keats and Mediterranean artisans were inspired by Greek ceramics and they reshaped those classic urns and vessels according to their own vision. For Keats's, his medium was language and through language, rhythm, imagery and metaphor.

The Romantic poet also toured Italy and drew a sketch of what is now a famous amphora, pictured below. Keats' drawing is of the **Sosibios vase**, exhibited at the Louvre.

Credit to 2014 Photo:

[Ilya Shurygin.](http://www.ilyashurygin.ru/)

<http://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=5609>



Credit to Photo:

[http://www.keats-shelley-](http://www.keats-shelley-house.org/en/writers/writers-john-keats/john-keats-the-great-year)

[house.org/en/writers/writers-john-keats/john-keats-the-great-year](http://www.keats-shelley-house.org/en/writers/writers-john-keats/john-keats-the-great-year)



Credit to 2014 Photo:

[Ilya Shurygin.](http://www.ilyashurygin.ru/)

<http://ancientrome.ru/art/artworken/img.htm?id=5608>



It's tempting to think of Keats's urn as painted and glazed in the Orientalist style of ancient Greece or similar vessels made in Italy, such as the one from RAFFMA. But perhaps the vase Keats imagined was **marble**. Support for this supposition appears in the lines, "O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede/ Of marble men and maidens overwrought." The brede, or braid, helps to frame the image of the figures below it, while also serving as a transitional piece between the body of the vessel and its neck. So too does the poem refer to a young female cow being led to the altar of sacrifice, a vignette perhaps suggested by the young goat or calf being led to the altar in the Sosibios vase.

Artwork: Sosibios Krater, Neo-Attic, 50 B.C.

Louvre: Department of Greek, Etruscan, and Roman Antiquities: Hellenistic Art (3rd-1st centuries BC)

Material: Marble

Analysis Prompt:

- What figures or details do you see in the poem and in the vases pictured above?
- This activity provides two possible inspirations are suggested for Keats' poem.
- Do you think the vase Keats imagined was painted or do you think it was marble? Support your answer.

Vocabulary List:

Attic: related to Athens

Krater: Urn shape with scroll like handles

Amphora: vessel with two handles and a narrow neck. Characteristic of Ancient Mediterranean pottery.

See also the magnificent collection of Ancient Mediterranean Ceramics at the Getty Villa in Malibu.

- II. Assigned text: William Wordsworth. "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, 13 July 1798." <http://www.tinternabbeypoem.com/>

Artwork #1. Edward Dayes, artist (1763-1804). Francis Jukes, engraver (1745-1812). *The View of Tintern Abbey on the River Wye*. 1799. <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/144575/SCE01096.jpg>

Medium: Aquatint



Look at:

- The composition (how the painting is arranged)
- Play between light and shadow
- Foliage
- Human Figures
- Surfaces
- Signs of industry and habitation
- Smoke and where it comes from
- Inside/outside space
- The sky and clouds
- The use of color

ENCHANTING RUIN: TINTERN ABBEY AND ROMANTIC TOURISM IN WALES

Enchanting Ruin Exhibition Notes: "The Picture of the Mind": Tintern & Vicinity through Images

C. S. Matheson, University of Windsor

This plate is one of sixteen large aquatints drawn by Dayes and engraved and published by Francis Jukes for a series called Views on the River Wye. The original watercolor drawing, dated 1794, is in the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester.

Dayes's vantage point is on the Gloucestershire or English side of the River Wye, near the ferry passage and landing jetty where tourist boats decanted in the period. He dwells upon the wildness and isolation of this border setting, evoking the drama of a traveller about to cross over into an unfamiliar land. Dayes's choice of view may also be intended to communicate something of his reverence for the monument. In an account of another ruin, Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, Dayes abjures his readers: "Retire to a respectful distance, ye dull and phlegmatic worldings; this spot is sacred to the arts, prophane [sic] it not with unhallowed feet...Here is ample scope for the moralist: let him behold here the perishable labours of man". Perhaps the far side of the Wye is the "respectful distance" that will allow the tourist to turn moralist.

Dayes catalogues the features and qualities that made Tintern Abbey such a popular destination, and therefore popular subject for art in the era. The scenic landscape is punctuated by the melancholy beauty of the Abbey ruins, so overgrown that the works of nature and the work of man are becoming indistinguishable. Here is that “pleasing intermixture of wildness and culture”, that contemporary travelers found so compelling. Dayes seems to allow the elements themselves to dictate the composition of the scene. The calm water of the River Wye in the foreground, the slopes and steeps of the earthy middle ground, and airy drama of a very characteristic sky, divide the view roughly into thirds, wholly in accordance with contemporary theories of the picturesque. Human occupation on the opposite shore is reduced to a few graceful figures; all signs of poverty are expunged, and the local industrial sites are concentrated into a plume of smoke at the upper right, barely visible against the limestone rocks behind. The original watercolor drawing contains a tall smokestack that is camouflaged in the final print. Tintern Abbey rises, as Dayes says of another ruin, “in solemn majesty...with the stately port of a giant.”

See also extract of Gilpin’s *Observations on the River Wye*:

<https://www.bl.uk/picturing-places/articles/the-picturesque-at-home-and-abroad>

Vocabulary List:

Abbey: a monastery led by an abbot (or a convent managed by an abbess). According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Tintern Abbey was founded for Cistercian monks in 1131 and was rebuilt and enlarged in the 13th century and early 14th century. The abbey was dissolved in 1537, by order of Henry VIII. The crown, represented by Queen Victoria, bought the land in 1900.

Wye: Major river in England and Wales, about 130 miles long. It flows from the moorlands of central Wales, generally southeastward through England to its Irish Sea mouth in the Severn Estuary. It is one of the major rivers of Britain (*Britannica*).

Analysis Prompt:

- What is the source of inspiration?
- What story is being told?
- What function does the abbey serve now as compared to the past?
- What has changed?

Assigned Text: William Wordsworth. "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, 13 July 1798." <http://www.tinternabbeypoem.com/>

Artwork #2: Joseph M.W. Turner. "Interior of Tintern Abbey", 1794

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1029849/interior-of-tintern-abbey-monmouthshire-watercolour-turner-joseph-mallord/>

Medium. Watercolor.



Look at:

- The composition
How the painting is arranged-- lines, angles, the double-horizon-point construction of perspective, different density of colors and textures, different scales of figures vs. objects, where your focus is led by these elements.
- Play between light and shadow
Where is the light coming from? What mood is conveyed?
- Foliage
Does it seem realistic? Is there artistic license at play? If so, why might that be? How does the contrast of organic forms work with the engineered forms of the architecture and the decayed or ruined elements of the architecture?
- Human Figures
Are they to scale - i.e. do they seem like the correct size? What are they doing? Why so few human figures?
- Surfaces
Compare the grassy horizontal with the architectural verticals, and then compare the forms of the foliage and the forms of the ruined elements of the architecture. Why might Turner have chosen these ratios of intact and ruined forms?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The repetition of the arch. Why has Turner chosen this view with so many arches visible, often through one-another? What are the further significances of the Gothic Arch as a form? • Inside/Outside space Are there clear boundaries between inside and outside space depicted? Are there clear boundaries between nature and culture - i.e. architecture? Is the scene disorienting? Is the scene 'inviting' you in as a viewer? Depending on your answers/rationales, consider 'why' to all your observations?) • The sky and clouds (Consider the repetition of shapes, echoes of the foliage and the ruined parts of the architecture. How do these repetitions affect your viewing and reading of the composition? Also, consider the typical weather patterns in England - often low grey skies, often raining, some sunny days in spring and summer, very changeable weather. Why has Turner chosen this depiction of the weather?) • The palette (choice of color) Describe the effect of color. Consider why Turner has chosen these colors and not others. • Where Turner takes your gaze
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Vocabulary List:

Chancel: the area surrounding the altar in a cathedral or church.

Gothic: the style in which Tintern abbey was built. Characterized by vaulted arches, stone masonry, architecture that aspires to great heights.

Picturesque: one of the ways to describe a moment of Romantic literature or image in visual arts. Often characterized by ruins, passersby, lovers, etc.

Ruins: architectural remnants of temples, palaces, monasteries, amphitheaters, monuments, fortresses. Emblematic of the past; nature often invades the built spaces.

Museum notes: According to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, “This watercolour shows the chancel and crossing of the Abbey. Here Turner’s observation of the forms and structure of the abbey reflect his training under Thomas Malton. The viewpoint of the composition allows Turner to explore the planar and spatial relationships of the walls and the dynamic rhythms of the arches. By filling the composition with the ruins of the chancel and crossing Turner emphasises the mass of the architecture. This is strengthened by placing the ruin in the foreground of the composition to emphasise the grandeur of it. Such reaction to the ruin follows contemporary ideas of the sublime.

Tintern Abbey and its environs was a popular tourist destination at the end of the eighteenth century. This was increased through publications such as the Rev. William Gilpin’s Observations on the River Wye (1782) and William Wordsworth’s poem Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey (1798). Visitors to the site were impressed with the way that nature had taken over the ruins, thus enhancing its picturesque beauty. This can be seen in Turner’s awareness of the sheer variety of contrasting surfaces in the building which work to emphasise the dynamics of the building underneath . . .”

Biographical information/Vocabulary

JMW Turner. According to the Victoria and Albert Museum, “Turner was born Covent Garden, London, 23 April 1775, son of a barber. Turner entered RA [Royal Academy] Schools in 1789. His first exhibited works at the Royal Academy were watercolours of architectural subjects. He had already gained experience as an architectural draughtsman, working for Thomas Hardwick and Thomas Malton... In 1791 Turner made his first extensive sketching trip. This was the first of what would become almost annual trips outside of London in which Turner would gather material for subsequent works. He recorded his visits through detailed pencil sketches, producing over 10,000 during these tours. He rarely painted directly from the motif in watercolour, stating in 1819 ‘that it would take up too much time to colour in the open air’ when he could make ‘15 or 16 pencil sketches to one coloured’. Most of his watercolours were developed instead from these pencil sketches once the artist was back at his studio.. . In a long and exceptionally distinguished career, he exhibited 259 works at the Royal Academy between 1790 and 1850 and 17 at the British Institute between 1806 and 1846, predominantly landscapes, sometimes with historical themes. **He is generally considered the greatest painter in the history of British art.** Turner died at Chelsea, London, 19 December 1851 and was buried in St Paul’s Cathedral. He bequeathed his extensive collection of oil paintings and watercolours to the nation, now principally housed in the Clore wing of the Tate Gallery. . .”

CSUSB students: You can find Turner’s *Modern Rome* exhibited at the Getty Museum and *The Grand Canal* in the European Gallery at the Huntington Library.

Analysis prompts:

- What kinds of colors does Turner use?
- What figures do you see and what are they doing?
- What mood does Turner convey?
- How does this image compare with Wordsworth’s vision of Tintern Abbey?
- Do the painting and the poem share elements? How can you compare their compositions?
- Do they share characteristics in mood and attitude?
- What is depicted (i.e. shown/represented) in the poem and the painting?
- How are these similar or different?
- What choices have been made to select and omit possible elements of the depiction in both the poem and the painting?

Prompts written in green font are courtesy of Matthew Poole, Professor of Art, CSUSB

III. **Assigned text:** Lord Byron. *The Giaour*. 1813
<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/b/byron/george/giaour/poem.html>

Artwork: Eugene Delacroix. *The Combat of Giaour and Hassan* 1826

Medium: Oil



Look at:

- **The composition**
(how the painting is arranged) -
What is the overall character/mood/style of the painting?
Consider what the lines and shapes are like, especially the 'negative shapes between forms, such as the horses and human figures. Is there a visual rhythm of lines, tones, colors?
- **The landscape**
Consider the level of detail and the way the landscape is depicted? How does this affect the way you see and navigate the composition? Consider the colors, tones, lines, textures, and the chiaroscuro (i.e. light and dark areas). Why might Delacroix have made these decisions?
- **The sky and clouds**
Does the sky echo shapes and forms in the rest of the composition? How does this add to the 'story-telling' and mood of the scene?
- **Figures in the foreground and background**
What effects are produced by the positioning of the figures? What kind of movements are conveyed? What do you think the characters are feeling (including the horses!)?
- **Gestures**
What are your interpretations of the gestures of both the human and the horses? What meanings can you draw from these observations?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weapons Are your eyes drawn to the weapons? if so, how is this accomplished by Delacroix? If not, why not? Are the weapons important to the scene? • The use of color Why has Delacroix chosen these colors and not others? How do the colors affect the way your eye moves around the painting? How do these colors affect your interpretation of the scene? • How movement is suggested List the different ways in which lines, shapes, color, pattern, detail and forms suggest movement of the figures (human and equine), as well as movement in the sky? Is there movement in the landscape? Use as many adjectives as you can to give characterization to the types of movement you see. Why so much movement - all over the composition? • The posture of the horses Attempt an interpretation of the proximity of the horses, and their depicted demeanor. Describe what you think has happened and will happen immediately before and after this 'snapshot' of the action. Why has Delacroix chosen this moment to depict? • Dust and where it comes from - Clearly this scene depicts dust flying around. Why has Delacroix added this to the scene? How does it affect your reading of the narrative, of the mood, of the tone of this scene? Is the dust symbolic and/or pictorially functional? If so, how and why?
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Museum Notes: Art Institute of Chicago <https://archive.artic.edu/rococo/combat/>

*“Following a visit to England in 1825, Eugène Delacroix, the leading Romantic painter in France, based this painting on the poem *The Giaour* (pronounced jor) written by English poet Lord Byron in 1813. The subject—passions avenged on the faraway Greek battlefield—is perfectly suited to the Romantic vision of exotic locales and unleashed emotion. In the painting, a Venetian known as the Giaour—a Turkish term for infidel—fights the Muslim Hassan to avenge the death of his lover, who was killed by Hassan after fleeing his harem. The stark setting and aggressive movements place the focus of the painting on these two main characters. Weapons poised, the enemies face off in mirrored poses: the Giaour in swirling white with bloodshot eyes, Hassan facing his opponent with his weapon raised. The dynamic motion and emotion of the composition, which looks back to the Baroque style of Peter Paul Rubens, is further heightened by the artist’s use of high-keyed colors and bold and loose brushwork. Delacroix’s handling of pigments was influenced by a mid-19th-century color theory that stated that a spot of color will appear to be surrounded by a faint ring of its complement. In Delacroix’s painting, the adaptation of this effect is seen in the artist’s use of complementary colors, rather than the addition of black pigment, to create shadows. The *Combat of the Giaour and Hassan* was included in an exhibition at the Parisian Galerie Lebrun to benefit the Greeks and their war of liberation from the Ottoman Turks (1821–1832). This political cause inspired numerous Romantic artists, writers, and musicians, and was the subject of one of Delacroix’s best-known paintings, *The Massacre at Chios*. The latter painting was based on an actual incident in the Greek wars of independence, unlike the Art Institute’s painting, which is derived from a work of fiction. Both are examples of Orientalism in Romantic painting, in which depictions of the Middle East and North Africa emphasize the exotic appeal of the lands and their people.”*

Vocabulary List:

Giaour: an infidel (from a Muslim perspective).

Ottoman Empire: Originated in Turkey. Invasion and domination through history of south east Europe, North Africa, and Mediterranean from 14th century to 20th Century. Included Greece, which is where the Giaour is set. Religious and political power through the sultan.

Greek War of independence: Greece sought freedom from Ottoman domination in the early 1800s. Byron (1788-1824) joined the cause, invested a significant amount of money to support military efforts, and died, probably of sepsis, in Greece in 1829. Greece was independent from Ottoman rule in 1830.

See <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/ottoman-empire>

Steed, Courser: Horse

Analysis prompt:

- What is the source of inspiration?
- Who is in the picture?
- What is the action being conveyed?
- How does Delacroix capture the ambush described in Byron's poem?
- How are the formal characteristics of the painting and the poem similar or different?
- How has Delacroix chosen to depict this moment? What other choice might he have made?
- Does Delacroix adequately capture elements of both the story and the mood from the poem?
- What conclusions can you draw about the attitudes and interests of the painter (Delacroix) and the poet (Byron)? What attitudes and interests do you think poet and artist share and where might they differ?

Prompts written in green font are courtesy of Matthew Poole, Professor of Art, CSUSB